

## Reflection Paper

**Subject:** United States History

**Grade:** 8

**Module 2: Planning for Active Learning :** Teacher implements instruction in order to engage students in rigorous and relevant learning and to promote their curiosity about the world at large by:

**Selected Indicator:** Developing and organizing coherent and relevant units, lessons and learning tasks that build on students' prior knowledge, skills and interests and engage students in the work of the discipline.

### Goal:

I will investigate reading and comprehension strategies that I can teach my students prior to the administering of the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Common Assessment. I will develop a series of lessons to teach my students reading and comprehension strategies enabling them to improve at reading for information, comprehending what they have read and using their improved understanding to deliver an improved assessment written product.

### Initial Summary:

In the 2011-12 academic year, I administered the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Common Assessment by distributing to each student a packet of the ten primary source documents that are used to build the basic knowledge for the writing portion of the assessment. My classes are heterogeneous and I believed that I would be able to call upon my students with very strong abilities once they had finished the assessment, to assist me in teaching those students that struggled with the assessment. The 8th Grade Common Assessment involves analysis of the primary source documents and a writing portion which is turned in several times for feedback in developing a writing product in the form of a letter to the editor.

The end product was not the best it could have been due to not teaching adequate and relevant reading and writing strategies prior to the students entering into the assessment. As it is very important to me to teach literacy, I can develop professionally by exploring methods of reading and writing strategies that I can teach my students to help them read for information comprehending the material and thus producing a higher quality writing product.

### Reflection:

I met with my TEAM Mentor and discussed various opportunities for growth in knowledge and practice in the area of planning. We selected indicator 2, Developing and organizing coherent and relevant units, lessons and learning tasks that build on students' prior knowledge, skills and interests

and engage students in the work of the discipline. We decided that my new learning would focus on, Develops discrete lessons and activities related to specific skills in the curriculum.

One major part of the 8th Grade curriculum in United States History is the completion of a Common Assessment. The Common Assessment focuses on ten distinct primary source documents, five from the loyalist point of view and five from the patriot point of view. The documents form the basis of the argument that students use to write a persuasive letter to the editor advocating for the position that they have taken regarding declaring independence. Last year I presented the documents to students in the form of a packet with the belief that they would work on the packet and those that finished could help those that needed additional help, what I found was that even the strongest readers in my classes lacked a deep understanding of these documents. For this reflection I will use the planning for four of these documents.

Document 1 – Paul Revere’s etching of the Boston Massacre. This document is presented as a primary source written description at the top of the page with Revere’s etching underneath it. As part of the document evaluation students are asked to answer two questions, how does the engraving tell a different story from the description of the Boston Massacre and how did Paul Revere’s engraving increase anger toward the British. Most of my student’s skip right over the reading and go to the etching dismissing that the written description does not match the etching and the students go directly to the massacred colonists and the cute dog which are depicted in the etching.

In discussing with my mentor (a senior history teacher), and the Common Core Coach, I knew that I needed to approach this document in a different way. During discussions it became evident that if I separated the etching from the description the students would have the opportunity to see that the two don’t match. It was suggested that I develop an 8½ x 11 landscaped paper, with the written description of the Boston Massacre at the top and that I ask students to draw what is described. Giving students, ample time to draw and reassuring them that details and not artistic ability are what counts, I will have students give a picture of his or her visualization of the Boston Massacre. When finished, students will have used the written primary source to produce his or her personal visualization of the source. Laura Robb, writes in Teaching Reading in Social Studies, Science and Math, the purpose of visualizing is to show students connections which lead to greater understanding. I will have each student compare his or her visualization with Revere’s color etching that I will display on the SMART Board. I will ask them to turn and talk to the person next to them about the differences that they see between the visualization that each student has drawn and the etching. As each student will have drawn based upon his or her visualization of the written description, the picture that the student has drawn and the Revere etching will not match. I believe that this will open a discussion in the pairings as to why certain things such as the snowballs are missing from the Revere etching and why the colonists aren’t taunting and cursing the soldiers as it states in the description. I can then ask students, based upon prior knowledge in earlier lessons, why Paul Revere would circulate such an etching.

Based upon the student drawing using the written primary source, students will comprehend the differences between the description and the etching. This comprehension will, as Cris Tovani presents in, I Read It, But I Don’t Get It, Comprehension Constructors, get students to wonder, think about what might be a possible answer to the question and make a connection. Using this strategy each student will be able to answer and fully understand the reasoning a patriot such as Paul Revere would want to shape colonists opinion against the British.

Document 2 – Captain Thomas Preston’s Account of the Boston Massacre. At first look, the Common Core Coach and I said to each other, “I don’t want to read it.” The document is so text rich, it is lengthy and goes on for over a page, single spaced with no paragraphs or breaks. We knew that if we didn’t want to read it neither would my students. The document also is written with some old English as well as words and phrases that would be unfamiliar to my students.

It was suggested that I chunk this document, looking for natural breaks. I met with my mentor, she agreed with our assessment of the document and after I had made the first pass through the document we talked through the breaks that I could put in the document to make it manageable for a typical 8<sup>th</sup> grade student. I will also insert simple in-text definitions or translations for uncommon words. We agreed that students would better understand this document if I inserted simple comprehension questions at the end of each paragraph of the document as this is important to comprehending the entire document. Understanding how to break down a document will be essential as we move toward more common core performance tasks.

By chunking this reading and providing very simple summarization questions throughout the text, it will support the student in what Stephanie Harvey calls, in *Strategies Used by Proficient Readers*, Synthesizing Information. Remembering that this document is Captain Preston’s sworn testimony as to his thinking and the events at what has come to be known as the Boston Massacre. I expect the outcome for students will be a greater comprehension of this very difficult document.

Document 3 – George Grenville Defends the Stamp Act in Parliamentary Debate with William Pitt, January 14, 1766. This document is a solid twenty two sentence paragraph of debate transcript. The debate is rich with points, and reasoning that students could utilize to build a loyalist letter. The hurdle here is breaking down the information so that students can determine the important ideas.

In discussing this document with the Common Core Coach, we thought it would be a good idea to establish pairings and jigsaw this document. I plan to divide the document up into numbered strips with each pair taking a portion of the document. I will instruct the class to read the piece of the debate that they have been assigned and analyze the piece for details. Once the pair of students has analyzed their portion, I will go through the piece in sequentially, asking each pair of student to report out the details of their piece so that the entire class gains an understanding of the complete document.

Laura Robb explains that the outcome that I should reasonably expect to achieve utilizing the jigsaw is deep thinking about a piece of the debate and anticipation in the presentation portion to see how the piece that the jigsaw pair is presenting fits into the whole document. Students will be able to determine the thesis as well as each point that is presented.

Document 4 - The Testimony of Benjamin Franklin in the British Parliament, 1766. This document is presented in a question and answer type of format. It is not the entire testimony of Franklin, pertinent question and answer pairs have been extracted for this document. The testimony is about a full page in length and is used as an anti-tax, pro-patriot document.

I met with the Common Core Coach and we discussed this document and the potential to use it to extract and analyze information while charting out meaning. We discussed the various opportunities to teach comprehension using this document. I wanted to use another strategy that I was introduced to in Laura Robb's, Teaching Reading in Social Studies, Science and Math. We discussed the various strategies and agreed that I would use a variation of the Collaborative Strategic Reading Strategy. This strategy calls for the pairing of students and having each pair read a part, one as the Member of Parliament, the other as Ben Franklin. Each pair will use a set of questions that will encourage discussion and lead to greater understanding. I will develop an exit ticket for the end of the lesson so that each student can show that they have achieved a deep understanding and can answer the questions that are associated with this document.

Working with my Mentor, Common Core Coach, Literacy Specialist and reading various books and articles during the planning module has encouraged me to analyze each unit, section and lesson that I teach my students. I will present the lessons that I have created and lessons that I will create for the remainder of this unit using these new strategies and others like them. Approaching planning as I have described will enable my students to analyze and evaluate the information that is presented in these primary sources and create the letter to the editor that is the assessment piece of this unit.